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## **Meeting New People**

Whether you have moved to a new town, are looking for romance or simply want to widen your circle of friends, it can be difficult to meet new people unless you know where to look. Opportunities to meet new people abound if you step out of your everyday routine. Opening yourself up to new experiences can help you can find the new relationships you are seeking.

Although the prospect of meeting new people can be intimidating, you should strive to be yourself. If you are shy and feel uneasy approaching strangers, you may feel more comfortable in settings designed for people to interact, such as participating in volunteer groups, clubs or continuing-education courses. Good communication skills are also important. Eye contact, a smile or a simple hello can help you start a conversation with someone you would like to meet.

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## **Around Town**

Your daily routine offers many chances to strike up conversations with new people. Your best options will be places where people have extra time to kill and are open to conversation. The local Laundromat can be a good place to meet people while waiting in line for the dryer or folding clothes. Bookstores and coffee shops also are good places to mingle. Offer to share a table with someone who looks interesting.

## **Volunteer Groups**

Volunteer organizations can be great places to get to know people while helping out your community. Opportunities to volunteer are everywhere: environmental groups, food pantries, literacy programs, hospitals, etc. Investigate programs in your community, and seek out those that appeal to your personal interests. Community events such as parades, festivals and fun runs also are good places to connect with people working on the event.

Your hobbies can lead you to people with similar interests. Do you enjoy reading mysteries? Check out the book clubs at your favorite bookstore or consider starting your own. Do you like to garden? Look into whether your community has a garden association or volunteer gardening group.

Whatever hobbies you enjoy, many communities have associations or clubs for people who enjoy the same things. To locate groups in your area, try checking the Internet for meeting times and places. Community newspapers, libraries and local grocery stores also may post calendars of events.

## **Sports**

Whether at the gym or in a social league, you can use your love of sports to create a new social circle. If you enjoy team sports, consider joining a weekend football, softball or volleyball league. Runners can look into local running clubs or groups training together for an upcoming marathon. Gyms also can be good places to meet people, especially right before and after group classes.

## **Civic and Professional Organizations**

Most professional organizations have networking or social events where you can meet people in your field. If you prefer to diversify your social contacts, check out a new group and make contacts outside of your normal business circle. Many civic groups, such as museums, symphonies, opera companies and ballet troupes, also have member organizations that offer social events and networking and volunteer opportunities.

## **Religious Groups**

If religion is important to you, your church, temple or other house of worship is a place to meet people who share similar beliefs. Inquire about opportunities to volunteer or participate in sponsored activities. Many churches and temples also have social programs to welcome new members.

## **Adult-education Courses**

Many universities, trade schools and high schools offer continuing-education courses on a variety of topics. Look for classes that meet more than once and require class participation so you can get to know your fellow classmates.

## **Friends and Family**

People you already know could be your best resource for expanding your social circle. Let your family and friends know specifically what type of people you want to meet. Ask for introductions. Let them know you want to be invited to parties and other gatherings with people outside of your normal group of friends. Be open about trying new activities, and make time in your schedule to join in activities when invited.

## **Personal Ads**

While personal ads are not for everyone, they can be a good way to reach a large number of people at one time. With personal ads, you can be upfront about exactly what type of people you want to meet and why. If you have a busy schedule and want to begin meeting people right away, a personal ad might be right for you. You can screen people over the phone and choose to meet only those people who sound promising. You should take extra caution, as discussed below, when arranging a meeting with someone you met through a personal ad.

## **Meeting People Online**

With chat rooms, online personal ads and online dating services, the Internet can be a very effective way to bring new people into your life. Meeting someone online by participating in online chats, exchanging e-mail or answering personal ads can be less intimidating than meeting someone for the first time face to face. Also, with the Internet, you literally can meet people any time and any place, which can be a bonus for busy professionals. However, the Internet does have some disadvantages. It is easy for someone to conceal his or her real identity and personality online. Be careful when meeting people over the Web, and take time to really get to know them by asking questions through e-mail and phone conversations before you make plans to meet in person.

## **Safe Introductions**

When you are getting together with someone for the first time, especially if you met through the personals or online, a few simple tips will ensure a safe and comfortable meeting:

Do not reveal personal information such as your last name, phone number or address until you feel comfortable.

Make plans to meet in a public place where there are other people, such as a restaurant or coffee shop, the first time you get together.

Before you go, be sure to let a family member or friend know the name of the person you are meeting, as well as when and where you are meeting.

Use common sense, and follow your instincts. If you feel like someone is concealing information or acting strangely, do not continue the relationship. It is easier to end things early than to try to extricate yourself from a difficult problem or situation.

A new friend or romantic partner offers the opportunity to enrich your life in a variety of ways. By keeping an open mind and trying new experiences, you can widen your social circle and find new friends to enjoy.

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